

# Daughters of the Digital Empire

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Book One of  
Moonlight Hearts

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And Margaret Lovelace

## Chapter 1: The Proposal

“Explain to me again why you’re marrying him?” I said. “He’s a total creep and raging misogynist to boot.”

I stared at Lynn with set shoulders as I waited for her response. Lynn glared at me over the laptop. I met her gaze and refused to blink. Lynn was my best friend. We had known each other since kindergarten. We shared nearly everything in common, except our taste in boys.

Rain pounded on the windows of the girl’s academic dormitory, and I could actually feel the wind shifting the building. Outside, lightning spiderwebbed across the sky, and then the thunder rattled the windows. I hadn’t had time to draw a breath between lightning and thunder.

Lynn shook her head. “I’m marrying him because that’s how it is. That’s who I marry. Period. No way around it.”

I picked up my wine glass and paused. Was it my wine glass? It couldn’t be Lynn’s. She was holding hers. But we were the last two girls standing tonight. Lindsay was asleep on the couch. We had held Sophie’s hair out of the way, while she retched into the toilet. Gabrielle was snoring. She lay on the floor, clutching the man-sized stuffed elephant that Lynn had named Bobo. The glass might belong to any of them. I shrugged and downed the contents of the glass. I’d regret this much pinot noir tomorrow. But tonight was not tomorrow, and tonight we had completed our exams.

“But he’s so skeezy,” I said. “He was hitting on those three other girls the whole time and doing it right in front of you. And then, he had the nerve to propose to you. And, I don’t understand why you’re saying yes! He has no concept of consent. He broke into your bedroom! He ripped your freaking top off when you accidentally got him horny that one time! He’s a world class creep. He’s a monster! A literal monster! Why are you marrying him?”

“Because that’s how you win the game, Ren.”

“You could have married any of the three other suitors,” I said, shaking my head.

Lynn continued glaring. “Marrying Prince Wulfric is the only way to get the good ending. In every other ending, Hyperborea goes to war with Ys. And, at best, you end up fleeing the country. Thousands of people die, because you chose true love. Not me. I’m saving the kingdom. End of story. No discussion.”

“He’s raping your character on the wedding night, guaranteed,” I said.

“No. We’ll be married,” Lynn objected.

“You’ve seen what Douchebag McScuzzball is like, “I countered. “I promise you, after the credits finish rolling, he’ll go too far. Your character will try to tell him no and he won’t stop. And he won’t stop, because he’s your husband. He’ll think he owns you. He thought he owned you when he was only obsessed with you. Once he’s married to you it’s over.”

“Who cares? The game is done by that point, and I’ve saved the kingdom,” Lynn said. “I’m accepting the proposal.”

“Why are you playing this game path again anyway? You’ve beaten every path through the game multiple times. What’s the point?”

“Cyrene Entertainment announced a sequel. I want a refresher course.”

“Okay, fine. I give up. But that doesn’t explain why you named the rival after me. Something you want to tell me?”

“You’re my best friend Ren. There wasn’t any other character I could name.”

“You could have named the heroine after me,” I said.

“I’m playing, so I get to be the heroine.”

Lynn reached her hand for the keyboard, and I grabbed the mouse. “Oh no you don’t. You’re marrying somebody nice, like that Leon guy. He actually respected your character. Or that Fiona girl. She’s hot as hell and nice.”

“Ren, I’m not gay. You’re gay. I am not marrying Fiona. And Leon won’t save thousands of lives. Give me the mouse.”

“Oh no.” I grinned, “You actually like Leon. And I’m not letting you throw away your digital life like this.”

“It’s my digital life,” Lynn said. “And if I want to martyr myself, you aren’t going to stop me.”

“You always martyr yourself. If I can’t stop you from doing it in real life, maybe I can still save you here.”

She grabbed at the mouse. We struggled over it, while I tried to decide how much horseplay was enough and how much would be pushing it.

“Let go Ren. I’m finishing the game.”

“I’m not letting go. You never let go of me. So I won’t let go either.”

“This is why you can’t keep a girlfriend,” Lynn said.

“What?” I said.

“How can any girlfriend compete with statements like that?”

And then I heard the thunder. It erupted like a freshman at a strip club. The eye of the storm was above us. As the thunder rolled, the room lit up, searing my eyes.

And then nothing.

